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JAZZ FESTIVAL NOTES

A musician on the limp

Enrico Rava is still stylish, though

People's Gospel Choir turns out to be a highlight of the Voices of Soul showcase

SUNDAY

THE SPECTRUM

Enrico Rava had a slight limp walking about the Spectrum stage Sunday night. He broke his leg a couple months ago, but his music moved ahead with sleek dynamism. The veteran trumpeter's interplay with young trombonist **Gianluca Petrella** was thrilling, while guest **Francesco Cafiso**, a 19-year-old alto sax phenom, made his mark with blistering, acidic solos.

Rava took time to explain a song title based on the prestigious Juzppar Award (as Europe's top musician) he won a couple of years back: "Usually the prizes we get consist of some silly statuette, bad-looking, sometimes a little dangerous because you can hurt yourself on the edges, but always very heavy, so you have to pay a lot of money in overweight (travel charges). This time they gave me a prize that consisted of a lot of money. So I wrote a tune called ... Happiness is a Big Prize in Cash."

By the end, he had the audience singing soft la-la-la's through **Ahmad Jamal's** classic Poinciana. The inner hum of the audience's collective voice melded beautifully with the deliriously happy sounds from the musicians.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

SALLE WILFRID PELLETIER

Sam Moore, one of the more interesting draws for Sunday's Voices of Soul concert at Place des Arts, cancelled early. **Carla Thomas**, equally anticipated, bowed out a week ago because of illness, according to festival organizers. In their place was **Ann Peebles**, who might have set a festival record by missing all three of her cues during the Vegas-y revue-style show.

The audience, however, seemed unconcerned and cheered loudly for almost three dozen Stax and Motown-dominated smashes from the '60s and '70s, mostly delivered by young Canadian singers **Jully Black, Dee Kaye Ibomeka, Deborah Cox, Jacksoul** vocalist **Haydain Neale, Dione Taylor** and show-stealing fireball **Sylvie Desgroseillers**. Headliners **Patti LaBelle** and the **Neville Brothers** performed only three songs each. The brothers, incidentally, were the only act not to use the teleprompters. Kudos to the great **Aaron Neville** and compa-

COURTESY OF FUSION3

Hard-edged with deep broodi-ing.

DISC OF THE DAY

Wollny/Kruse/Schaefer

call it [em]
Act/Fusion3

[em] is a Bavarian "un-piano-trio" of under-30 players bringing the North American premiere of their first album to the Montreal jazz festival. Call it [em] is a remarkably confident, well-formed debut, featuring the hard-edged attack of jazz trio the Bad Plus but replacing the bombast with deep brooding. They bring musique concrète, free jazz and loads of noir to a nocturnal urban landscape. The album opens with playful gallops like The Mean Spider of Tandorine, then settles into a long, startlingly atmospheric denouement. Michael Wollny is an idiosyncratic pianist, Eva Kruse plucks a plangent bass, and Eric Schaefer approaches drums as a music box. [em] plays a free concert at the CBC Television Stage tonight at 8 p.m.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

ny for skipping the script.
BERNARD PERUSSE

One of the best things about the Voices of Soul show was the **People's Gospel Choir** of Montreal, under the direction of **Kim Sherwood**. The 40-voice group opened the concert with a rousing I Lift You Up, Oh Lord, sang behind Patti LaBelle during Way Up There, and brightened up four other performances with their wall of sound.

The choir rehearsed for the show for about two weeks, putting in 50 hours of practice along the way, according to **Shauna Callender**, who joined the group for Sunday's show only.

Full-time choir member **Jill Johnson** said the chance to work with LaBelle made her life surreal. "This is a really special occasion for us," Johnson said during a dress rehearsal Sunday afternoon. "The people we're singing with are very, very spiritual." LaBelle joined the choir's prayer circle during Saturday night's rehearsal, Johnson said, and prayers were offered for soul singer **Luther Vandross**, who died Friday. "We love Patti. When we're with her, she's just one of us," she said.

BERNARD PERUSSE

MONUMENT NATIONAL

Expectations were high at the Monument National Sunday night. Every seat was taken, and the master musicians were pumped. Tabla player **Zakir Hussain**, capping the last of a four-concert series, set the tone, saying: "It's a blessing to be here in this incredible festival with one of the best audiences in the world." Guitarist **John McLaughlin**, paying tribute to "my brother in every sense of the word," hooked up to a Mac laptop and developed a bluesy raga.

It was the start of an incredible evening, in which McLaughlin referenced music reaching back to the pair's mid-1970s group, **Shakti**. The concert was stunning in its level of communication, with virtuosity taking second place to the perfect note or rhythmic combination. It climaxed when Hussain's partners from previous concerts in the series – sarangi master **Sultan Khan** and percussionists **Bhavani Shankar** and **Vinayakram Selvaganesh** – joined.

EVENS BLOCK

METROPOLIS

A capacity crowd jammed into Metropolis Sunday night for a triple bill by seminal British electronic label Ninja Tune. Things started off surprisingly jazzy as down-tempo maestro **Bonobo** and his band delivered a dreamy set alternating between melodic loops and instrumental wandering. The soprano sax was particularly sweet. Bonobo was on bass.

Next up was live hip-hop-funk act the **Herbaliser**, a crew that has played the fest too many times to count, and perhaps one time too many. The crowd's roaring reception was a testament to the group's infectious party vibe. But things got boring quick as they fell into a tailspin of repetitive grooves.

DJ Food saved the day (or the night, as it were), dropping a wickedly musical set of big-band funk, hip-hop and breakbeats, mixing records at a dizzying pace and turning the venue into one big, giddy dancefloor.

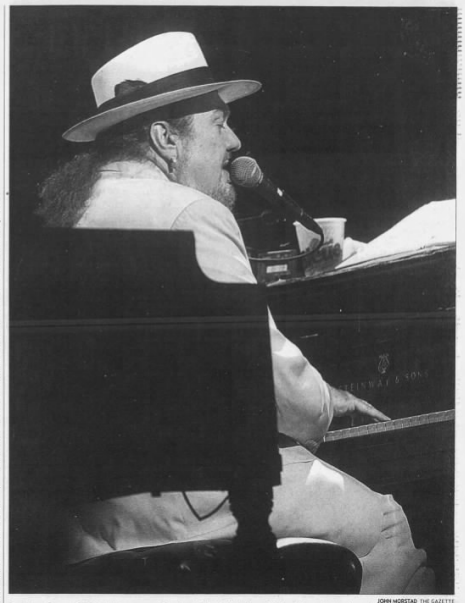
TCHA DUNLEVY

ART GALLERY

The colours are pure post-punk – deep black, blood red and psychotic white – and the rough brushstrokes are alley-wise. The stark urban look of Spirit, by Montreal artist **Zilon**, is this year's official festival painting, available at the festival art gallery (at the northwest corner of Place des Arts's esplanade).

Spirit depicts a female singer, trumpeter and drummer in disturbing perspective, reflecting "the environment you experience in smoky underground nightclubs, of lounge lizards playing their soul," says the 48-year-old local graffiti-art pioneer.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ



JOHN MORSTAD THE GAZETTE

Dr. John performs at Théâtre Maisonneuve of Place des Arts last night. He and his band drove hard, but in an almost perfunctory way.

Pat Metheny has done a lot in his 30-year career, but Montreal still holds a special place for him

Montreal veteran

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Pat Metheny, the Montreal jazz festival's perennial patron saint, who kicks off a special invitation series tonight, was so "seriously jet-lagged" when he arrived in Montreal yesterday that he wasn't quite sure whether he'd played in Europe one or two nights before. But the wide-ranging guitarist did have instant recall about his first times in Montreal, key moments that changed his career.

"The general bilingual nature of Montreal is something so unlike almost anything else in the world that it creates a certain communicative atmosphere," he said. "People don't know whether the person next to them is going to start speaking in French or English. To me, that awareness and sensitivity transfer to the feeling a performer gets from the audiences here.

"I noticed it right away from when I came to the old In Concert Club (in Old Montreal) with Gary Burton in 1974. There was just this kind of intensity to the way people were listening to things that's unlike any place in the States and more like, I later learned, it was in Europe."

After the news conference promoting his "carte blanche" – five indoor shows with musicians he invited and a free concert with his group closing out the festival on Sunday – he recalled those early days and beyond.

On teaming with Burton and Steve Swallow again, for the first time in 30 years: "Playing with Gary and Steve will always be something special. That band" – it also included drummer Dan Gottlieb – "is a big part of why I became a musician, and getting to play with them in my formative years had an enormous impact on me, so I still get chills just thinking about it.

"The concept of that band – the orchestration of vibes, guitar, bass and drums – had such interesting potential then, and it still does. I'm just so excited. I'm pumped."

THE GAZETTE

Metheny: easy-going.

After he left Burton to form his own group, he opened for Jean-Luc Ponty in Montreal in 1978.

"We had just driven two days from Texas to get here. The band had been going for just a few months at that point, yet people went crazy. Success to me was playing with Gary. His group was like the Beatles to me, really incredible. And I had no sense of anything above that ceiling. Because Jean-Luc had reached a certain level, when we played that concert in front of several thousand people, it was the first time I considered that maybe our group could reach that level."

Metheny's final concert, performing his CD-length opus The Way Up in its entirety, arrives on Sunday night.

"It took us a while, but after 100 concerts we're able to present it way better, I think, than we did on record. It's grown as we've grown into our parts. It's a very hard piece to play harmonically. I describe it to musicians as having to learn (John Coltrane's) Giant Steps times about 100. There's so many modulations. As Lyle (Mays) and I were writing it, we said, 'There's no way we can tour with this, so we don't have to worry about ever learning it.' But once it was done, we changed our minds. Then we had to memorize it, and that took all of us several months. Even having written it, there are so many inscrutable modulations."

Musicians guesting with Metheny also weighed in yesterday. Trumpeter Enrico Rava first played with Metheny a couple of years ago when the guitarist expressed a desire to play with Italian musicians. "He surprised me," Rava said, "because he sounded like he never did anything else in his life but play in my band. He got into it completely. Yes, he's a superstar – even in a pop way – and usually when they get that big they get difficult. He's very modest, easy-going, very open as a musician and a person."

Charlie Haden first started talking about doing the duet that became the classic 1996 album Beyond the Missouri Sky in the early '80s, when the bassist played on Metheny's 80/81 recording and tour. "I feel very lucky when I meet someone who feels the same way I do about the preciousness of life and music," Haden said. "It's like when I met Ornette (Coleman) – it's a rare, special thing."

Said bassist Steve Swallow: "I really don't know what to expect. Pat sent me a package of tunes with the intention to take another look at the music we played way back when. But I strongly suspect it's going to come out in a different shape. On the other hand, there are aspects of our playing that are like fingerprints and don't change."

REVIEW

Not so exciting

Dr. John's tame

The groove is there, but not the energy

BERNARD PERUSSE
THE GAZETTE

Ah, but it can be a fine line between laid-back and tired. Sometimes the line between funky and phoned-in can be equally difficult to locate.

Let's give the benefit of the doubt to Dr. John. Let's agree for the moment that his brief set last night at Théâtre Maisonneuve of Place des Arts stayed just...just...on the right side of those lines. What does it mean, then, that the good doctor's band had to verbally prod the audience members out of their seats – in notoriously overenthusiastic Montreal – nine songs in, during Right Place, Wrong Time?

Maybe it was just early in the evening. Or perhaps there was this feeling that the portly, white-suited physician of funk was keeping an eye on the clock during his 90-minute, 13-songs-plus-an-encore, check-please-goodnight performance.

What saved the evening is that driving New Orleans groove that is, by its very nature, incapable of being boring. Professor Longhair taught us that.

Last night, Dr. John duly served up all the right courses, playing a driving piano foundation with his left hand and rolling out whorehouse blue notes with his right, egged on by guitarist John Fohl. Drummer Herman Ernest and bass player David Barard, lockstepped in a backbone-slipping Mardi Gras beat, drove the band particularly hard on Hen Layin' Rooster and the gospel closer Glory, Glory. You could somehow fill in the horn parts in your mind.

Did it rock? Of course. Excite? That's another matter.

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